

Characters in De Sica Films

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1. Open

a) Mara (*Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*) is a spirited woman, with high energy but also a kind heart. Although she is proud, she is unpretentious. Given her piety, she feels guilty, but only a little, about her trade as a prostitute. At the same time, she has fierce self-respect and submits to no one. A subtle blend of sensuality and morality, she embodies the complex social commentary hidden beneath the comic surface of her episode.

b) Micol (*The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*) is the young daughter of the family. She, is an independent-minded character, both as a child and a young woman. When one young man is asked about her, he says, 'Very beautiful. She's tall and blond. But unpredictable.' That is an apt description of the young woman who is also well-educated, writing a thesis on Emily Dickinson (an appropriate topic since the American poet's verse explores intense feelings of love and pain). She loves her brother and she loves her garden, especially the tall, exotic palms. She is ambiguous and difficult to read at times, but in the end, she shows her loyalty to Giorgio.

c) Giuseppe (*Shoeshine*) is a young boy, full of enthusiasm and the capacity to dream. Less mature, and less able to control his emotions, he is more vulnerable than Pasquale and more likely to worry about possible problems. In short, he is a sweet, delicate boy, which makes his loss of innocence all the more tragic.

2. Closed

a) Domenico (*Marriage Italian Style*) is domineering, flippant, self-assured and arrogant. A good-looking and successful businessman, he treats people as his servants and the world as his fiefdom. He may show kindness, and even affection, but only when it is convenient. If he were aware of his insensitivity, he might regret it, but even that is not certain. At the end, he does display some tenderness towards the boys who might be his son.

b) Giorgio's father (*The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*) remains unnamed and his profession unidentified. He is a pragmatic person, who attempts to shield himself and his family from the worst of the worsening political situation. He doesn't have a walled garden, like the Finzi-Continis, so he arms himself with justifications and keeps his head down. Whatever his shortcomings, possibly too passive in his accommodation with fascism, he proves his worth in the final act of the story.

3. Agreeable

a) Natale (*The Roof*) Natale is an uncomplicated young man, attractive, polite, affectionate and hard-working. He is also practical, wary of quick schemes and ambitious for his future with his new wife. Although easy-going, he has a pride that will not allow him to take insults from his bossy brother-in-law. His love for Luisa is tender and constant.

b) Luisa (*The Roof*) Luisa is a strong person, but she is also sensitive (like Natale) and considerate of others. As a young and new wife living with her in-laws, she wisely keeps a low profile and tries to adjust herself to the household routine. That kind of maturity for such a young person is matched by her practicality and confidence. She never becomes despondent, never raises her voice in anger, always shows kindness and always seems to make the right decision.

c) Rosetta (*Two Women*) Rosetta is a sweet young girl, devoted to her mother and to the church. She shows kindness to everyone, even soldiers in the dangerous context of the war. Her life is changed when she is subjected to a brutal rape, which leaves her numb and speechless. Whether

she has the inner strength, like her mother, to survive is left uncertain.

d) Adelina (*Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*) is an exuberant character, large in every sense, powerful, belligerent and impulsive. A resident of a poor neighbourhood in Naples, she embodies the independent spirit of ordinary people, especially when interacting with institutions and officers of the government. She is also an attractive, and alluring, woman, oozing sensuality with every move.

e) Carmine (*Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*) is Adelina's jobless husband. He is a meek person, easily dominated by his spirited wife. He appears feckless, uncertain and reliant on support from his 'mama,' but later on he does show some strength of character and helps free Adelina from prison. He is certainly devoted to her, and also shows good qualities in his role as the father of a large family.

4. Disagreeable

a) Anna (*Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*) is easily the least likable character in the entire film. Wife an affluent businessman, she realises that her life is stagnant and wants to escape. She chooses a car and lover Renzo to take herself away from her empty existence. Unfortunately, she is also shallow, self-serving, hypocritical and cruel.

b) Arcangeli (*Shoeshine*). The leader of the boys in Giuseppe's prison cell is named Arcangeli. He is an older boy, a bully with a smirk, who manipulates others to satisfy his needs. It is he who organises planting the file in Pasquale's cell to make sure he is punished by the guards. And it is he who plans their escape. He is a cocky and devious character, who shows his true colours when, in the final scene, he runs away.

5. Conscientious

a) Cesare (*The Roof*) Like the other men in the story (Luisa's angry father, and Natale's silent father), Cesare is difficult. He is a large, burly and proud man, an experienced bricklayer who taught the trade to Natale. As he senior man in the joint-family (the father-in-law is all but absent), he has a lot of responsibility. That might explain his quick-fire anger and bullying behaviour. Underneath that belligerent exterior, he has more positive qualities of kindness and loyalty.

b) Pasquale (*Shoeshine*) At twelve years old, Pasquale is somewhat older than Giuseppe, and taller, as well. He acts in the role of an older brother, advising and guiding the younger boy, until they enter prison and their bond is broken. He is also a character with principles, who is adamant that they should never snitch on the others (Panza and Attilio) involved in the robbery. Ironically, though, it is he who is tricked into confessing and earning the disrespect among his fellow-prisoners, especially Giuseppe, as a 'grass.'

6. Unconscientious

a) Augusto (*Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*) The son of a powerful politician, Augusto has little motivation except his libido. He is a comic figure, bumbling in his childish devotion to Mara and, especially, to her sexuality. Like a child, he is impatient to satisfy his needs, but he also has the depth of character to cooperate with Mara in helping the grandmother.

7. Emotional

a) Cesira (*Two Women*) The Italian title of the film identifies Cesira as 'the woman from Ciociaria'. Later, she goes to Rome, but she is still a product of that isolated village in the mountains, with its peasant-based cooperative spirit, lack of pretension and resignation to hardship. Cesira is, however, somewhat unusual in that she is a ferry and sensual woman, outspoken and fiercely maternal. She is a very powerful presence that dominates the film.

b) Filumena (*Marriage Italian Style*) is a complex character, with different qualities revealed at different points in her story as she shifts from young prostitute to middle-aged mistress. She was born in the slums and took to prostitution out of necessity, engendering in her a life-long desire to gain social respectability. She is vulnerable but also shrewd and resourceful. In the end, she shows powerful emotions of love, revenge and forgiveness.

e) Giorgio (*The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*) is the young man who loves Micol and is easily hurt. As a lover, he is somewhat passive and adoring rather than active and sexual. He has a poetic

nature, quiet, contemplative and deeply emotional in matters of romance. As regards politics, he shows more awareness and is angered by the rise of fascism. Throughout, he is a sensitive and kind person.

8. Rational

a) Michelle (*Two Women*) The young rebel Michelle stands out among the villagers as an intellectual, or at least a literate person. He is also thoughtful, opinionated, idealistic and honest. Although crystal-clear about his political principles, he is confused about romance. Throughout the story, he shows tenderness to both Cesira and Rosetta. And in the end, he makes a decision that protects others and costs him his life.